

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. In a general-purpose computer system, a lending library apparatus comprising:
- a electronic asset lending library database containing a plurality of user accounts and at least one license for one of a plurality of unused electronic assets;
 - an account manager to maintain the user accounts; and
 - an asset manager to maintain the licenses for the unused electronic assets;
- and
- a loan manager to control the borrowing of the license for the unused electronic asset by a borrower having a one of the plurality of user accounts.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the loan manager further controls the lending of the license for the unused electronic asset by a lender having another one of the plurality of user accounts.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein:
- the account manager further maintains a subset of the plurality of user accounts as members of a one of a plurality of communities;
 - the asset manager further maintains ownership of the license by one of the communities; and
 - the loan manager restricts the borrowing of the license for the unused electronic asset to a borrower having a user account membership in the same community having ownership of the license.

1 4. The apparatus of claim 3 wherein:
2 the account manager further maintains a subset of the plurality of user
3 accounts as members of a one of a plurality of access control lists;
4 the asset manager further maintains an association between the access
5 control list and the unused electronic asset; and
6 the loan manager further restricts the borrowing of the license for the unused
7 electronic asset to a borrower having a user account listed in the access control list
8 associated with the unused electronic asset.

1 5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the access control list restriction is
2 overridden in response to a request by a borrower not having a user account listed
3 in the access control list associated with the unused electronic asset.

1 6. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:
2 a notification manager to notify the borrower when the loan manager
3 approves a loan to the borrower of the license for the unused electronic asset.

1 7. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the borrower notification is an electronic
2 message addressed to the borrower and containing written instructions for installing
3 for downloading the unused electronic asset.

1 8. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the notification is communicated over a
2 communications network.

1 9. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the communications network is the
2 Internet.

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10. The apparatus of claim 6, further comprising:
an electronic distribution mechanism to automatically install the unused
electronic asset on the borrower's computer in response to the loan approval.

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11. The apparatus of claim 3 wherein a community is one of a plurality of types of
intra-organizational entities, including a project team, department, or division.

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12. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for
performing:
managing a plurality of user accounts;
managing at least one license for one of a plurality of unused electronic
assets; and
controlling the borrowing of the at least one license for the unused electronic
asset by a borrower having a one of the plurality of user accounts.

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13. The computer-readable medium of claim 12 wherein:
managing the plurality of user accounts includes associating each user
account with a one of a plurality of communities;
managing the license includes associating the license with a one of the
plurality of communities and assigning the license to one of the plurality of user
accounts; and
controlling further includes restricting the borrowing to eligible borrowers,
wherein an eligible borrower is associated with the same community as the license.

1 14. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 having computer-executable
2 instructions for further performing:
3 displaying the plurality of unused electronic assets; and
4 reassigning the at least one license to a second one of the plurality of
5 accounts in response to a selection of a one of the plurality of unused electronic
6 assets from the display by a borrower using the second one of the plurality of
7 accounts.

1 15. The computer-readable medium of claim 14 wherein:
2 managing the plurality of user accounts includes adding or deleting each user
3 account into at least one of a plurality of access control lists or not;
4 managing the license includes associating the unused electronic asset with a
5 one of the plurality of access control lists; and
6 controlling further includes restricting the borrowing to a borrower listed on
7 the access control list to which the electronic asset is assigned.

1 16. A method comprising:
2 creating a license for an unused electronic asset;
3 assigning the license to a first account having membership in one of a
4 plurality of communities;
5 re-assigning the license from the first account to a second account if the
6 second account is eligible to use the license and has membership in the same one
7 of a plurality of communities as the first account.

1 17. The method of claim 16 further comprising:

2 communicating to a user of the second account information about the unused
3 electronic asset, including whether the license is available, and wherein the license
4 is reassigned to the second account only after receiving a request from the user.

1 18. The method of claim 16 wherein the one of a plurality of communities is an
2 organizational entity, including a division, department or team.

1 19. The method of claim 16 wherein the second account is eligible to use the
2 license if the second account is listed on an access control list for the unused
3 electronic asset.

1 20. The method of claim 17 wherein communication to the user of the second
2 account is disabled if the second account is not a member of the same community
3 as the first account.

1 21. The method of claim 19 wherein the second account is not eligible because
2 not listed on the access control list for the unused electronic asset, but subsequently
3 determined to be eligible in response to an override request received from the user
4 of the second account.

1 22. A computer implemented method comprising:
2 generating a license and associated license restrictions for an unused
3 electronic asset on a lending library server;
4 displaying to a borrower the license and associated license restrictions on a
5 lending library client;

6 receiving a borrower selection for the license and transferring the license to
137 the borrower if eligible in accordance with the associated license restrictions;

8 transmitting to the borrower instructions for the installation of the unused
9 electronic asset in compliance with the transferred license on the lending library
10 client.

1 23. The method of claim 22 wherein the lending library server and the lending
2 library client are connected to a communications network.

1 24. The method of claim 22 wherein the associated license restrictions require
2 the borrower to belong to a community, the community being the same community
3 to which the unused electronic asset belongs.

1 25. The method of claim 24 wherein the associated license restrictions further
2 require the borrower to be listed on an access control list associated with the
3 unused electronic asset.

1 26. The method of claim 24 wherein the community is an organizational entity,
2 including a division, department or team.

1 27. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic asset lending library database
2 resides on a removable data storage device.

1 28. The method of claim 22 wherein the data storage device is a CD-ROM or a
2 DVD-ROM.